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Memorandum of Conversation

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy and Force Levels in Thailand

NSA review completed

DATE: October 4, 1975
TIME: 2:40 p.m.
PLACE: The Secretary's Office

PARTICIPANTS:
The Secretary
Charles S. Whitehouse, American Ambassador to Thailand
Philip C. Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
George B. Roberts, Director, EA/TB (Notetaker)

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State Dept. review completed

JCS review completed.

The Secretary: Charlie.

Whitehouse: How do you do, Mr. Secretary.

Habib: This is George Roberts, Country Director for Thailand.

Roberts: How do you do, sir.

The Secretary: I hope we've worn you down enough so that you will go back refreshed.

Whitehouse: Absolutely.

The Secretary: Newsmen tell me that you think there is a total lack of guidance. I don't give a damn about U.S. troops in Thailand by themselves. I don't want them to fight. I don't want Thailand to go Communist, but I don't mind if they want to use Peking to balance off Hanoi. I don't want the world to see us rush pell mell out of Southeast Asia. I want the Chinese to see that we still have

GR

EA/TB:GBRoberts:mgh

(Drafting Office and Officer)

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USAF review completed.

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strategic interests in that part of the world which we are not going to give up. DOD wants to get out, but they never stand up to any threat. If our troops are a liability to the Thais in facing up to the Communists, then obviously they should not be there. Chatchai tells me the Thais are anti-Hanoi. They are not sympathetic to Peking, but they are anti-Hanoi.

Whitehouse: I'm sorry you got the perception. . . .

The Secretary: Joe Alsop says that you said you had no policy guidance.

Whitehouse: I have been afraid we would get into a self-defeating effort to keep a greater presence there than the Thais could accept. The Thais have been saying loudly for months now that all troops had to be out by March.

The Secretary: But they are always making rhetorical statements they don't fulfill.

Whitehouse: Now they are saying they only want combat forces out. There is now a paper at the NSC which has been held up for weeks and weeks.

The Secretary: Why has it been held up for so long?

Habib: It was over in DOD for weeks. We finally got it out of DOD.

The Secretary: Is there a common position?

Habib: Yes, all are agreed. DOD, CIA, the NSC Staff. It leaves a force of about 3,000.

The Secretary: Maybe if there was a difference we would get to make a decision sometime.

Whitehouse:

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Habib: Don't forget the U-2's.

Whitehouse: The U-2's are the only thing on which I might have some difficulty. Two U.S. "spy planes" are going to be awfully hard to sell.

The Secretary: Does the Pentagon agree to this?

Habib: Yes.

The Secretary: What are the other options?

Habib: All forces go is one. The other would have us keep two bases.

The Secretary: What do you think?

Roberts: The high option has us keep 18 to 21 planes in Thailand. I think the middle one is right.

Habib: George is one of the authors of the paper. If he doesn't say he agrees, I'll kill him.

Whitehouse: There's more in the preferred option for us than there is for them.

The Secretary: But it keeps us engaged. And that is what they want. How are things going with Chatchai?

Whitehouse: He's much more prudent than he was. He's all cooled down now.

Habib: The key man is Khukrit.

Whitehouse: Yes, but recently the views of Chatchai and Khukrit have converged.

The Secretary: I don't want pressure from newsmen. But then you don't do it systematically. Joe Alsop said you said you didn't know what I was doing.

Whitehouse: Rubbish. Phil knows I have been clear on your instructions. You know how Phil is. He never takes his beady eyes off me.

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The Secretary: He never takes them off me, either. He always wants to be sure that I am doing what he wants me to do.

Habib: The Thais have told us they want to be told what we want.

The Secretary: We want to keep a presence there to show the Chinese that we are still interested in that part of the world. We want to show the rest of the world we have not had it in Southeast Asia. We also want to know what the Thais want.

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Whitehouse:

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Habib: You've done very well, Charlie, in the way you have brought Khukrit along on all this.

The Secretary: Reality will show them that they have much to gain and little to lose by having us there.

Whitehouse: There will still be pressure from Hanoi. Radio broadcasts and all that sort of thing.

The Secretary: But they will get that anyway. Hanoi are specialists at that sort of pressure. The Thais will just have to learn to put up with it, unless they want to become like the Laotians.

Whitehouse: The problem is Khukrit's parliamentary situation. He has 14 parties in his government. He has a terrible time keeping them all together.

Habib: Plus pressure in his rural areas from the insurgents.

Whitehouse: Another problem is the impression that the Thai military is worried about Khukrit and afraid that he is going to throw the baby out with the bath water. That is not true. The Thai military are with him in this.

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The Secretary: When are you going back?

Whitehouse: Tuesday.

The Secretary: What about your wife?

Whitehouse: She and the children are going to stay here until the winter. Then they are all coming out.

The Secretary: Is the house nice?

Whitehouse: Yes, Bill Kintner fixed it all up.

Habib: We never could have got it done. It's a good idea to have a political appointee every once in a while so we can the houses fixed up. The career guys can never get that sort of thing done.

The Secretary: Then maybe I should send Turner Shelton to Bangkok.

Habib: No, it's true. The political guys can always get money for improvements.

The Secretary: Do you have a swimming pool?

Whitehouse: Yes. Mac Godley got me one in Laos and the roof fell in on him. Kintner got me one in Bangkok. But you need it. Bangkok is so hot it makes Saigon seem like Zermatt.

Habib: It's low and hot and wet. The mosquitoes are huge. They'll eat you up.

The Secretary: I've been there several times and I never noticed them.

Habib: But they keep you in a cocoon.

The Secretary: Well, thanks for coming in. I hope you have a good trip back.

Whitehouse: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Cleared: EA - Mr. Habib (draft)
Ambassador Whitehouse (draft)

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